

car was stopped and H., a visitor to Honnametti, got out and ran after the bull in the hopes of turning it off the road. On rounding the corner an extraordinary sight met his eyes:—An elephant group—a bull and 2 cows and a calf, had just come on to the road, and as the cart-bull trotted up to the party the 2 cows put their heads together and without hesitation pushed the cart-bull off the road down into the long grass below. Luckily it was not much of a drop and the cart-bull appeared to suffer no harm!

(2) While motoring up the road to Honnametti my wife came on a solitary bull bison walking slowly up the road in the same direction. The bison appeared to take no notice of the car behind it but heaved from side to side as though very ill. On my wife sounding the horn, however, the bull turned round, lowered its head and advanced slowly towards the car. The car was reversed none too steadily however and went into the bank! The bull had in the meantime turned again and proceeded to walk up the road once more. It turned and repeated the performance every time the horn was sounded. Eventually the bull turned the corner and my wife gave it about 10 minutes before following slowly in the car, only to find the bull waiting expectantly round the corner facing her with its head down. Reversing back round the corner, my wife waited for about 20 minutes before proceeding slowly forward again by which time the bull had left the road and could be observed moving slowly through the long grass below, every now and again staggering from side to side and giving every indication of suffering from either a severe wound or disease. One may assume that sick as it was, the bull would have attacked the car, had my wife not reversed on each occasion; and had those in the car not realized that the bull was definitely not in its normal condition, the incident might have given rise to a record of another instance of an unprovoked attack by an unwounded bull bison.

C/O BASE POST OFFICE,
CEYLON.

R. C. MORRIS,
Lt.-Col.

March 23, 1943.

III.—OCCURRENCE OF THE HIMALAYAN TAHR (*HEMITRAGUS JEMLAHICUS*) IN SIKKIM.

As little appears to be known about the distribution of the Himalayan Tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*) in the eastern part of its range, the following note may be of interest.

Unfortunately I lost my shikar diary during the withdrawal from Libya last year and this note is written from memory only, so the details as to elevations, distances, etc. may be slightly erroneous, but the main facts are correct.

In November 1939, while waiting to join up, I decided to fill in time with a shooting trip in Sikkim as I was already living in the Darjeeling district, the original object being simply to bag a Burhel (*Pseudöis nahoor*).

While discussing passes etc. with the political officer at Gangtok, I was told that earlier in the year a German Natural History Expedition, from I think, Munich, had discovered 'a new kind of

animal on the slopes of Kancheng-junga'. This animal was described as a sort of goat or sheep and went by the local (Lepcha) name of '*shepi*'. There was no mention of it in the Sikkim Durbar's list of game which may or may not be shot, and I could find out nothing more about it in Gangtok.

It did not at that time occur to me that it might be a type of Tahr, as the Tahr was not included in the above mentioned list either, and although I believe the Tahr is known to occur as far East as Bhutan, I had only heard of one case of its being reported from Sikkim which was many years ago somewhere in the Talung Chu. In any case a German Natural History Expedition would presumably have recognised a Tahr on seeing one, and would hardly have described it as 'a new kind of animal', though it must be admitted I only had this information at second hand.

The omission of the Tahr from the Sikkim game list may be due to confusion arising from the fact that in Sikkim and the Darjeeling district the local (Paharia) name for Serow (*Capricornis sumatrensis*) is '*tahr*' and the Serow is included in the list.

I had more or less forgotten about the '*shepi*' until I got to Chum Tang, a Lepcha village near where the Lachen and Lachung rivers join to form the Teesta; here I found one of the local Lepchas had joined the German expedition earlier in the year, and on enquiry he said he knew of the place where they had found the '*shepi*', though he had not been with them at the time. It was many years since he had seen a live specimen himself.

My time and stores being limited, I pushed on to Thanga after Burhel but made arrangements for the Lepcha '*shikari*' to go to the '*shepi*' ground straightaway and to report to me on my return journey as to the chances of finding any.

On my getting back to Chum Tang about a fortnight later, the shikari met me and told me that after spending several days and nights in the jungle, he had located a flock of '*shepi*'. The ground was apparently situated some distance up a small tributary, the Pim Chu, which joins the Lachen on its right bank about five miles above Chum Tang.

The next morning we set off for the '*shepi*' ground, travelling light; the shikari, two coolies and myself. The distance from Chum Tang turned out to be only about ten miles but the going was very bad. A cattle path led along the bank of the Lachen for two or three miles, but after that there was no track at all and kukris had to be used frequently to cut a path through the jungle to allow the laden coolies to follow. In many places ladders had to be made out of tree-trunks to help them to climb up steep banks and rock-faces and over some of the enormous boulders which completely blocked the bed of the stream.

The range at the head of the Pim Chu is some 12,000 to 14,000 ft. in height and the valley floor slopes very rapidly towards the Lachen, with numerous water-falls in its course. The hills on either side are extremely steep and clothed in dense forest, but where the bed of the stream reaches about 7,500 ft., the forest stops abruptly and above this the banks on either side are positively precipitous, while above the precipices there are steep grassy slopes dotted with patches of scrub-jungle and stunted bamboos. The

whole area is cut up and broken by old land-slips and the surface is mostly very loose and gives but poor foot-hold. The rain fall during the monsoon must be fairly heavy, and at the time of year that I was there (early December) the sun never penetrates to the valley floor, leaving it cold and inhospitable.

By about 3 p.m. we had almost reached the point where the jungle ends and the precipices begin, and as there is no flat ground or water available except in the bed of the stream, we decided to camp there on a patch of sand between the boulders, in spite of the obvious chilliness of the place. There was no alternative anyway!

The Lepchas proceeded to build themselves a lean-to out of branches and leaves, backed by a large rock, and I had a forty-pound wind-proof tent. While putting up the latter the shikari suddenly said, 'There they are!' and pointed towards the grassy slopes further up the opposite (North) side of the valley. I could hardly believe him, as I was under the impression that we should have to go considerably higher before finding any '*shepi*', but on examining the slope through my binoculars, I could certainly make out two or three black animals grazing at the top of one of the cliffs. I was still somewhat sceptical however and thought they were probably only Serow after all, as we had noticed plenty of Serow tracks in the jungle on the way up from Chum Tang, but the Shikari swore that they were not Serow ('*Tahr*' in his language), but '*shepi*'.

It was too late to begin a stalk that evening and the same night I had the misfortune to develop an attack of dysentery.

The next morning we could see no '*shepi*' from the camp, so we climbed up through the jungle on the north side of the Pim Chu, and by about mid-day, reached the top of a rock slab overhanging the slopes on which the '*shepi*' had been grazing the previous evening; the only living thing to be seen however, was a cock monal pheasant (*L. refulgens*), and except for some tracks and droppings in the jungle, which might easily have been those of Serow, there was no sign of the '*shepi*'. We had something to eat and were resting on the top of the cliffs, high above the floor of the valley, when three or four black objects appeared, but this time on the south side of the nullah, i.e., the side opposite to us, and well out of rifle-range. It was impossible to cross the valley at that point as the precipices on either side were quite unclimbable; the only way was to return to the camp-site some distance back down the valley and to cross there. There was not time to do this before dark, so we just had to content ourselves with waiting in the hope that something might turn up on the slope below our rock where we had seen them the evening before. Nothing appeared however, but I had a good view through my binoculars of the '*shepi*' grazing on the opposite cliffs, and I watched them for a considerable time.

The following day we tried the cliffs on the south side and nearly got within range of a male with the best head I had so far seen, but the going was extremely bad and I was beginning to feel weak with dysentery; the result was that I dislodged a stone which

went bounding down the hill side and scared the 'shepi' who went off, with a shrill whistle of alarm, straight up the valley where the ground rapidly got worse, and we soon had to give up any attempt to follow them.

We were making our way back to camp in the late afternoon when five 'shepi' appeared on the far side of the nullah below the slope on which we had first seen them, but of course they were again out of range; I had another good view however.

We tried the north side once more the next day, but by then I was feeling decidedly groggy and could not move without sending showers of stones down the hill sides, and again the only 'shepi' we saw were on the opposite side of the valley.

The following day I was feeling slightly better, but provisions were running low, and as I still had a four-day trek back even to the comparative civilisation of Gangtok, and considering the state of my health, I thought it advisable to move back to Cham Tang, as I saw no more of the 'shepi'.

During my four days in the Pim Chu valley however, I had several good views of 'shepi' through field-glasses, and on one occasion without glasses, and I am convinced they are the same as the 'Tahr' of the Western Himalayas, or possibly an eastern race of the same species. The Lepcha shikari said they were the same kind of animals as the German Expedition had obtained. I personally saw at least eight 'shepi' and there may have been dozen or more inhabiting that part of the valley, but curiously enough, a friend of mine who visited the same spot with the same shikari some two months later, was unable to find any at all; the snow conditions would of course have changed by then; when I was there the snow was not lying below 10,000 ft., though it froze hard every night.

ON ACTIVE SERVICE,
April 1943.

C. J. T. WRENICKE,
Capt.

IV.—LIFE SPAN OF SOME WILD ANIMALS IN CAPTIVITY.

A Chital stag (*Axis axis* Erxl) born in the Trivandrum Zoo in 1920, died of old age last December. For some time previous to its death it was showing unmistakable signs of old age. Veterinary examination also resulted in establishing old age as the cause of death. This deer has thus lived for 22 years. We have had others of the same species for periods ranging from 12 to 18 years. Would it be a record age for Chital in captivity, as it is so for this zoo?

Incidentally, similar records of the age of some other animals may not be out of place. In spite of the curtailment of freedom involved in keeping wild animals in captivity, it has been the experience of the staff of menageries and Zoological Parks, that most of the animals and birds live to a ripe old age. As we have no means to ascertain the span of life of animals in their wild state, it would only be possible to infer the years for which they would live, from the data available in zoos. Therefore, a few particulars